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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION FUELS RISING CRIME

1. (U) SUMMARY: With the situation in Zimbabwe growing ever more desperate, illegal immigrants from there continue to stream into Francistown, the largest city near the border, at roughly the same rate as in 2004. Desperation has fuelled a rising crime rate, particularly theft and prostitution, which is being blamed on illegal Zimbabwean immigrants. Interlocutors from the Botswana Police Service, local government and civil society have no evidence that Zimbabweans are being trafficked into or through Botswana. Cross-border familial ties and the demand for cheap labor will likely keep frustration with rising crime from translating into demands that the GOB will pressure the Mugabe regime for change. END SUMMARY.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION FROM ZIMBABWE CONTINUES

2. (U) Poloff visited Francistown week of June 28th to update the situation. Zimbabweans continue to move back and forth across the border with Botswana illegally, but their numbers appear not to have increased significantly so far this year. In a June 28 meeting, Officer Commanding for District 1 (greater Francistown) Mr. Boikhutso Dintwa told Poloff that police officers in his district had arrested 2,110 illegal immigrants in May 2005, 2,003 in April, 1,751 in March, 1,156 in February and 2,010 in January, virtually all Zimbabweans. He described these numbers as roughly equal with those recorded during the same time frame in 2004. In a separate meeting, Commanding Officer at the Center for Illegal Immigrants Mr. Diseko told Poloff that the number of Zimbabweans passing through his facility so far this year did not differ significantly from the previous year. Mr. Dintwa indicated that on June 29 and 30, the GOB would conduct the first "clean-up" campaign of the year designed to round up illegal immigrants and deport them. These operations typically occur on a quarterly basis, he said.

IMMIGRANTS FUELING CRIME

3. (U) The incidence of crime in Francistown is rapidly rising, Deputy Mayor Mrs. Rebecca Nshakazhogwe told Poloff, that most residents blame the Zimbabwean illegal immigrants. She and an assistant relayed a series of anecdotes about instances in which they personally had been victimized. Not only is crime becoming more common, Nshakazhogwe explained, but also the perpetrators are growing more aggressive. City residents have responded by forming neighborhood watch committees and sometimes resorting to vigilante justice. So far, however, this has done little to contain the problem.

4. (U) According to Mr. Dintwa, most break-ins in the city appear to be the work of Zimbabweans. Often, he said, thieves will jump the border just after dusk and walk through open fields into town. After breaking into and pilfering from several houses, they will walk back across the border before sunrise with their loot. The GOB has discovered that the deployment of Botswana Defense Force soldiers around the farms between Francistown and the border tends to coincide with a decrease in such robberies. The border is too long, soldiers too few and costs too great to maintain such a deployment indefinitely, however.

PRESSURE FOR HARDER LINE ON MUGABE NOT FORTHCOMING

5. (U) Despite the rising crime caused by illegal immigration from Zimbabwe, the residents of Francistown are not yet exerting significant pressure on the GOB to alter its relationship the Mugabe regime. No public meeting, regardless of its subject, can conclude without someone expressing dire concern about illegal immigration and the proliferation of crime in Francistown, District Commissioner Mrs. Syliva Muzila told Poloff. Yet, she estimated, at least one in four Francistown residents house an illegal immigrant. Many of these are relatives of Batswana who have opened their homes out of sympathy for the plight of their kin in Zimbabwe.

6. (U) In addition to the familial bonds that span the

border, Francistown residents have found illegal immigrants a convenient source of cheap labor. Mrs. Muzila, who sits on a committee that reviews applications for work permits in the district, indicated that almost every application is for a Zimbabwean to work as a maid or farm hand. For every farmer or house owner who goes through official channels to obtain a work permit for an unskilled laborer, there must be several who employ illegal immigrants informally.

PROSTITUTION RISING, NO EVIDENCE OF TRAFFICKING

17. (U) Although prostitution is clearly a growing problem in Francistown, no evidence has emerged that this involves trafficking in persons. Mr. Dintwa told Poloff that his police stations had received no reports of people forced or coerced into sex work. He believed that the vast majority of prostitutes in Francistown were Zimbabwean women struggling to survive. Periodically, he said, these women returned to Zimbabwe to share some of their earnings with their families. He complained that Botswana law made it difficult to convict someone for prostitution, so the best the police could do is use laws against loitering in a vain effort to clear the streets.

18. (U) Local government officials echoed Dintwa's comments. In separate conversations, District Commissioner Syliva Muzila and Deputy Mayor Rebecca Nshakazhogwe confirmed that commercial sex work appeared to be flourishing in Francistown. Neither had encountered any evidence that the individuals involved were victims of trafficking.

19. (U) Staff of the Matshelo Community Development Association (MCDA), which works with communities at high risk of contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS, also did not believe trafficking to be a problem in Francistown. MCDA has teams of peer educators in sixteen locations primarily in eastern Botswana. Most of these volunteers are former sex workers. Mrs. Motlhabani, Coordinator of the NGO, told Poloff on June 28, that none of MCDA's volunteers had reported any examples of trafficking.

110. (U) She explained to Poloff that while there were "brothels" in Francistown, the proprietors generally were landlords charging rent but not attempting to force people into sex work. Motlhabani explained that often women are not fulltime prostitutes. Many turn to sex work only when they are desperate for cash. Once their financial situation improves, they leave the streets only to return if their luck runs out again.

COMMENT

11. (SBU) Many Batswana feel an historical sense of indebtedness to Zimbabwe because of the numbers of Batswana who studied or worked there in the early 1980s when they saw Zimbabwe as a land of opportunity. This, in addition to familial ties binding many Batswana to Zimbabweans, the demand for cheap labor in Botswana, and the GOB's desire to maintain cordial relations in the region result in a patience with and willingness to incur certain costs as a result of the crisis in Zimbabwe. Although it is impossible to say when the Mugabe regime will exhaust that patience, slowing economic growth is likely to push more migrants into crime, thereby hastening that time. Much will depend, however, on the enigmatic next President's disposition toward Mugabe, which Post will continue to investigate.

112. (U) The International Labor Organization is administering a project called "Toward the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor" (TECL), which will include an assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children in Botswana. Poloff has met with Dr. Okello-Wengi, the contractor who will conduct this research, to share with him some contacts to facilitate a thorough investigation. According to Dr. Okello-Wengi, an escort service based in Tlokweng, a suburb of Gaborone, is rumoured to be trafficking children across the border to South Africa. Post will follow up on this issue and continue to investigate all reports of trafficking and monitor the process of the TIP-related TECL research program.

HUGGINS